

TELEPHONING

With the dial tone
I finger numbers
spinning out my call
across America.
On the third ring
a woman sings, "Hello."
As kindly as I can
I say the same.
I begin my story.
In a pause for breath
silence crackles
through the wires.
And with still a bit
of song
that same voice asks,
"Who is this?"
I tell her my name
and add, "You don't know me --
that's why I called."
Another silence.
I'm just about
to add onto my story
when she blurts, "Damned idiot!"
hanging up,
leaving me to dangle
on the end of the line,
alone with the dial tone
and her one declaration.
I'm surprised by it
and wonder if
perhaps she does know me.
But that's my one long
distance call for today.
Tomorrow I'll try
my social security number.
Now I'll just wonder
who the woman was
and remember her remark,
so personal.

CAPITAL X

I found exes,
big capitals in red,
on sections of sidewalk and curb
cracked by age and weather.
The slightest crack provoked one X.

They appeared last fall.
This summer jack
hammers rattle through the day;
we awaken with them,
go to sleep at night with them.

Their echoes ring
beneath the canopy of trees
throughout our neighborhood
sometimes even after dark.
Their noise replaces
racket by cicadas
in our thoughts;
apparently cicadas
won't come out this year.
Perhaps that noise scares them
into thinking of
some giant insect
waiting on their hatch.

I've now begun to find
the same red exes
crossed on trees along our street,
older, mature ones
in grass between sidewalk
and curb. I think
their roots have sprung
the concrete slabs
so they have to go
before repairs are made.

Other exes mark those trees
beneath our power lines;
I've seen these done before.
Men truck in saws, ropes,
machines that eat up wood.
You see creatures
swing in trees, buzzing
off branches on the sides
and on the tops until the trees
are left denuded.

In a dream last night
buzz saws and jack hammers
threw me thrashing
in my sheets; I woke up
sweating, having seen myself
with tincture of iodine
paint an X across my chest.

-- William Vernon

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